

Philosophy.

The birthplace of wine.

To search for the origins, the hope of finding answers in the past and indications for the present, often will take you a long way. It is in the southern Caucasus, in Georgia, that the birthplace of wine seems to be. To validate this hypothesis, over five hundred grape varieties have recently been found in a relatively small region: an extraordinary richness to be found nowhere else in the world. Numerous archaeological findings trace back to the Neolithic era the first evidence of grapevine domestication: in this area, in fact, seeds that are very similar to those of the *vitis vinifera* – “domesticated” grapevine – were found and dated to around 6000 BC. Dating from the same period is also the oldest remaining wine residue hitherto known: a deposit of tartaric acid salts found on the bottom of a large clay cistern in one of the Neolithic settlements of Southern Georgia (Sulaveris-Gora, Chramis Didi-Gora). A kind of prehistoric amphora whose shape and deep connection with the production and storage of wine remind us of the jars produced in the South Caucasus in the IV-III century BC and in the Mediterranean area, where this ancient vessel was called “*pithos*” in Greek, “*dolium*” in Roman and, following the empire’s expansion, “*tinaja*” in Spanish.

Even today, in Georgia the traditional method of wine production continues to be based on the use of these amphorae, called “*kvevri*” (in Kakheti and Kartli) or “*churi*” (in Imereti and Racha) They are usually completely sunken in courtyards adjacent to the houses or in the “*marani*” - proper masonry wineries. Winemaking techniques, unchanged over the centuries, and long maceration on the skins, pips and peduncles contribute to making the wine fermented in *kvevri* absolutely unique and incredibly rich in polyphenols and aromatic compounds.

Amphorae production

The production of *kvevri* and *tinajas* is extremely challenging, for which experience and rigor must necessarily be supported by a great physical effort. All the Elements are fundamental for the operation’s success:

Earth

Clay, a material considered by Rudolf Steiner as a mediator between the Cosmos and the Earth. It must be of excellent quality, weathered and dried

by the sun and wind and should be without hard impurities as much as possible. Afterwards, stone is used to grind it into fine powder, from which all impurities must be removed.

Air

Air is a fundamental element for the raw material to be of high quality. Air is essential once more in the numerous phases of amphorae production. In fact, it is in the open air, not in the sun, that the layers of clay are periodically left to dry, patiently and avoiding thermal shock.

Water

Without water, clay powder would not be malleable. The right amount of water and time give the clay the correct texture for it to be handcrafted by skilled hands. The amphorae, of varying sizes and capacities ranging from 4 to 35 hectolitres, are shaped entirely by hand, without the help of the lathe. The technique used is similar to that of the "*colombino*"(coil technique), where the clay is shaped into rolls and added, merging layer on layer from the base upwards.

Fire

In the oven, built with special techniques and materials for generating and withstanding over 1000°C temperature, the clay cooks and hardens. After a slow cooling process, the amphora is finally ready to be used. The element that is both common and essential to all the amphora-making phases is clearly Man: dexterity and experience, gestures and history combine to turn the clay into an artefact of incredible beauty, where the grape juice becomes wine.

Very few producers of *kvevri* remain in Georgia today; the same can be said for the producers of *tinajas* in Spain: our hope is that the renewed attention towards the unique wines born from these vessels is able to ensure the survival of a culture and a productive system that has spanned the centuries.

